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Rāga Sutta 2

The Second Discourse on Lust | It 69

Theme: Our negative emotions are the raging ocean

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2011, 2018

1 Sutta summary and highlights

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND SIGNIFICANCE

1.1.1 The Rāga Sutta 2 (It 69) is a short instructive text on the urgent need for renunciants —monks and nuns—to abandon the 3 unwholesome roots, that is, lust, hate and delusion. Hence, we can and should understand “**renunciation**” (*nekkhamma*), in practical and spiritual terms (in terms of our actions and thoughts), as referring to the avoiding of lust, hate and delusion. In short, to ensure our karma is always wholesome. [1.2]

1.1.2 When we have not abandoned lust, hate and delusion, we are floating around in dangerous waters and have “**not crossed the ocean with its waves, its tides, its whirlpools, its predators, its monsters**” [1.3]. The Sutta closes with the ocean-crossing verses [§§7-8], which hints that, in such a predicament, we are still under the power of “the King who is Death,” that is, Māra [1.5]. Only when we have abandoned lust, hate and delusion—or when we are free of them, such as when we are truly mindful or during deep meditation—we are free from Māra.

1.2 THE ROOTS OF KARMA

1.2.1 Unwholesome karma. **The Mūla Sutta** (A 3.69) distinguishes karma into two major categories: the unwholesome (*akusala*) and the wholesome (*kusala*). **Unwholesome karma** is *intentional action* that is spiritually detrimental to the doer, morally blamable and has the potent for a bad rebirth and painful results. “Intention” (*cetanā*) behind an unwholesome act means that our mind is rooted in greed, hate or delusion.

The deeds’ unwholesomeness comes from their *roots*, that is, greed, hate and delusion, from which arise secondary defilements such as selfishness, gluttony, envy, anger, pride, arrogance, laziness, prejudice and forgetfulness, and from which more defiled actions arise. Hence, an unwholesome act can occur whether we are aware or conscious of it or not—often, when we are overwhelmed with lust, hate or delusion, we act unmindfully without even considering the negative consequences of our actions.¹

1.2.2 Wholesome karma. **Wholesome karma** is intentional action that is spiritually beneficial and morally commendable, and that ripens in happiness and goodness. The action’s wholesomeness comes from its roots, that is, non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion, or in positive terms, charity, lovingkindness and wisdom, respectively.

Actions motivated by unwholesome roots necessarily bind us to the suffering cycle of rebirth and redeath. Actions motivated by wholesome roots, however, may be of 2 kinds, mundane and supramundane (or, more simply, worldly and spiritual).

¹ **Mūla S** (A 3.69) SD 18.2; SD 4.14 (1.5); SD 50.20 (3.1.3).

Mundane (*lokiya*) wholesome actions have the potential of producing happy rebirths and pleasant results in our rebirth. Supramundane (*lokuttara*) wholesome actions are those cultivated by walking the eightfold path that leads to awakening and liberation. This is the karma that ends all karma.²

1.3 THE WATER IMAGERY

1.3.1 The water- or ocean-crossing parable is a well known in the suttas.

1.3.1.1 Like the ocean imagery, that of a flowing river, too, speaks of the same dangers—we see this parable explained in **the Nadī,sota Sutta** (It 109), thus:

“Suppose, bhikshus, a man [114] were carried away by a river-current, which appears to be pleasant and enjoyable.

3 Then, a man with vision standing on the bank sees him and says:

‘My good man, you are being carried away by the river currents, *which appears to be pleasant and enjoyable*.

4 But downstream, there is a (wide deep) lake with waves and a whirlpool, with predators and monsters.³ When you reach there you will meet with death or deadly suffering!’

5 Then, the man, hearing the other person’s words, exerts effort with hands and feet against the stream.

6 I have used this parable, bhikshus, for the sake of making a point. This is the point:

‘**The river-current,**’ (*nadī,sota*)

bhikshus, is a term for craving.

‘**Which appears to be pleasant and enjoyable,**’ (*piya,rūpaṃ sāta,rūpaṃ*)

bhikshus, is a term for the 6 sense-faculties.

‘**The lake downstream,**’ (*heṭṭhā rahada*)

bhikshus, is a term for the 5 lower fetters.⁴

‘**The danger of waves,**’⁵ (*sa,ūmi,bhaya*)

bhikshus, is a term for anger and annoyance.

‘**With whirlpools,**’⁶ (*s’āvaṭṭa*)

bhikshus, is a term for the 5 cords of sense-pleasure.⁷

‘**With predators and monsters,**’ (*sa,gaho rakkhaso*)

bhikshus, is a term for womenfolk.⁸

‘**Against the stream,**’ (*paṭisota*)

bhikshus, is a term for renunciation.

‘**Effort with hands and feet,**’ (*hatthehi ca pādehi vāyāmo*)

bhikshus, a term for the application of energy.

² See (**Vitthāra**) **Kamma Nidāna S** (A 4.232/2:230-232), SD 4.13. See also SD 18.2 (1+2).

³ “Lake,” *rahada*. These images are explained at SD 34.7 (3.5.2): [[see individually]].

⁴ The 5 lower fetters (*oram,bhāgiya saṃyojana*): (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya,dīṭṭhi*); (2) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*); (3) attachment to rituals and vows (*sīla-b,bata,parāmāsa*); (4) sensual lust (*kāma,rāga*); (5) aversion (*paṭigha*). See **Oram,bhāgiya S** (S 45.179) + SD 50.11 (2); SD 10.16 (1.6.7).

⁵ For a more detailed description of the dangers of “waves, ... whirlpools, ... and predators and monsters” (this imagery and the foll two), see **Cātumā S** (M 67,16+18+19), SD 34.7, where “river dolphins” is the equivalent of It 69’s “predators and monsters.” M 67’s “danger of crocodiles” (*kumbhīla,bhaya*) is missing from It 69.

⁶ *Āvaṭṭa* (sg), like *ūmi,bhaya* (sg), is tr as uncountable (pl) to fit the context.

⁷ These are the pleasures based on the 5 physical senses.

⁸ This obliquely refers to the celibacy rule of monastics, which eschews any kind of sex.

‘A man with vision standing on the shore,’
bhikshus, is a term for the Tathagata.”⁹

(*cakkhumā puriso tire t̥hito*)
(It 109/4.10/114), SD 52.11

1.3.1.2 The Rāga Sutta 2 (It 69) warns that a monk or nun “who has not abandoned lust, ... hate, ... delusion” is said to be “one who has not crossed the ocean with its waves, its tides, its whirlpools, its predators, its monsters” (*na atari* [Be *atiṇṇo*] *samuddarṃ sa, ūmirṃ sa, vīcīṃ s’āvattarṃ sa’gaharṃ sa’rakhasarṃ*) [§2-3]. The meanings of the underlined keywords—except for “its tides” (*vīci*) [1.3.1.3]—are explained in the excerpt from the Nadī,sota Sutta above.¹⁰ [1.3.1.1]

The Nadī,sota Sutta commentary also informs us that the “lake downstream” (*heṭṭhā rahado*) refers to the 5 lower fetters, which are to be broken by the non-returner; the once-returner and the streamwinner, too, have not broken these lower fetters which binds us to the sense-world.¹¹

1.3.1.3 The Commentary explains “(with) its tides” (*sa, vīcīṃ*) as referring to “anger and annoyance” (*kodhūpāyāsa*) (ItA 2:37,23). It quotes **the Ūmi,bhaya Sutta** (A 4.122), but where the word, “waves” (*ūmi*) is used, which is clearly a synonym for *vīci*. Hence, the Commentary reads it as, “The danger of the tides, indeed, bhikshus, this is a name for anger and annoyance” (*vīci, bhayan’ti kho bhikkhu kodhūpāyāsas’etarṃ adhivacanarṃ*).¹²

The Cātumā Sutta (M 67) gives a detailed description of the meaning of the danger of “anger and annoyance” (represented by the imageries of waves, *ūmi*, = tides, *vīci*). In summary, new monks who have renounced the world, but when they are instructed in personal decorum regarding their postures and conduct, they react with anger and annoyance like the laymen they were before.¹³

1.3.2 The ocean-crossing verse

1.3.2.1 While in the prose section of **the Rāga Sutta 2** mentions only the abandoning of “lust, hate and delusion” (*raga dosa moha*), the 1st **ocean-crossing verse** speaks instead of those “whose lust, hate and ignorance (*raga, dosa, avijjā*) have been overcome, | that one has crossed the ocean, hard to cross, | with its predators, its monsters, its danger of waves” [§7]. The 3 unwholesome roots (greed, hate, delusion) are not mentioned, but instead we have the 3 basic latent tendencies of *lust, hate and ignorance*.

This can only mean that while the prose section addresses those who have abandoned only the 5 lower fetters or a part of it—that is, the non-returner, the once-returner and the streamwinner—the closing “ocean-crossing” verses refer to the arhat—which is, in fact, confirmed by the last ocean-crossing verse [§8; 1.3.2.2].

1.3.2.2 Buddhaghosa, in his **Visuddhi,magga**, describes desire both as a current and as a river. It is said that greed (*lobha*), “swelling like a river of craving (*lobho ... taṇhā, nadī, bhāvena vaddhamāno*), a swift-flowing river into the ocean, carries beings to the states of loss” (Vism 14.162 f/468). The idea is that once we are overwhelmed with greed, we are powerless against where it brings us or what its brings us as a result.

The 1st “ocean-crossing” verse of **the Rāga Sutta 2**, on the other hand, describes one “whose lust, hate and ignorance have been overcome, that one has crossed the ocean, hard to cross” [1.3.2.1]. The

⁹ Cf the raft imagery in **Āsivisōpama S** (S 35.238,7.1-9/4:174), SD 28.1.

¹⁰ On these imageries, see also SD 52.9 (1.2).

¹¹ On the 10 fetters and sainthood, see SD 52.10a (2.3).

¹² A 4.122,10/2:124, which read *ūmi, bhaya* for *vīci, bhaya* (SD 47.9); also at **Cātumā S** (M 67,14-20/1:459-62), SD 34.7.

¹³ **Cātumā S** (M 67,16), SD 34.7.

2nd “ocean-crossing” verse, closing the whole Sutta, tells us that this is the liberated saint (an arhat) who has “won his goal” as one who “had befooled the King who is death ...” [§7].

The **Samudda Sutta 1** (S 35.187), too, describes the arhat as “one who has crossed this ocean, so hard to cross” with all its dangers ... reached the world’s end—he is called one who has crossed over.¹⁴

1.5 MĀRA. The Rāga Sutta 2 only obliquely alludes—in the last line of the “ocean-going” verses—to Māra as “the King who is Death,” that is, *maccu,rāja* or Māra personified as “death” [§7].¹⁵ While the Rāga Sutta 2 only alludes to Māra in his closing verses, **the Rāga Sutta 1** (It 68) applies the Māra imagery throughout its prose section, but does not mention him in its closing verse.¹⁶

2 Related suttas and teachings

2.1 The Rāga Sutta 2 applies the well-known *sa,ūmi*-stock phrase—“**the ocean with its waves, its tides, its whirlpools, its predators, its monsters**”¹⁷ (*samuddaṃ sa,ūmiṃ sa,vīciṃ s’āvaṭṭaṃ sa,gahaṃ sa,rakkhasaṃ*)—which psychologically represents the 3 unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion [1.2], the motivational roots of our bad karma. Existentially, the ocean, with all its dangers, represents samsara (*samsāra*), our cyclic life of rebirths and redeaths.

2.2 ELEMENTS OF THE WATER-CROSSING PARABLE

2.2.1 The Rāga Sutta 2 (It 69) applies various similes in its ocean parable. As we have already noted [1.3], this *sa,ūmi*-stock contains many of the following ocean imageries and their meanings. (Those appearing in this Sutta are denoted by their paragraph references):

			<u>danger (bhaya)</u>	
waves	<i>ūmi</i>	[§6]	anger and annoyance; lay habits	<i>kodhūpāyāsa</i>
tides	<i>vīci</i>	[§§3, 5]	anger and annoyance [1.3.1.3]	<i>kodhūpāyāsa</i>
whirlpools	<i>āvaṭṭa</i>	[§6]	the 5 cords of sense-pleasures	<i>pañca kāma,guṇa</i>
predators	<i>gaha</i>	[§6]	(sexual lust, including homosexuality) ¹⁸	<i>micchā,dhamma</i>
monsters	<i>rakkhasa</i>	[§6]	womenfolk (same as the following)	<i>mātu,gāma</i>
river dolphins	<i>susukā</i>		womenfolk (danger to celibacy) ¹⁹	<i>mātu,gāma</i>
crocodiles	<i>kumbhīla</i>		“belly-filling” or gluttony ²⁰	<i>odarikatta</i>

The *sa,ūmi* stock for the water-crossing parable occurs with these variations:

<i>samuddaṃ sa,ūmiṃ sa,vīciṃ s’āvaṭṭaṃ sa,gahaṃ sa,rakkhasaṃ</i>	Rāga Sutta 2	It 69,3
(<i>cakkhu</i>), <i>samuddaṃ sa,ūmiṃ s’āvaṭṭaṃ sa,gāhaṃ sa,rakkhasaṃ</i> etc	Samudda Sutta 1	S 35.187,4
<i>ūmi,bhayaṃ kumbhīla,bhayaṃ āvaṭṭa,bhayaṃ susukā,bhayaṃ</i>	Cātuma Sutta	M 67,16
Same as preceding	Ūmi,bhaya Sutta	A 4.122,2
Part of the <i>nadī,sota</i> parable	Nadī,sota Sutta	It 109,6

¹⁴ S 35.187,22 (SD 52.9).

¹⁵ On Māra, see SD 52.10a (1.2).

¹⁶ It 68/3.2.10/57 f (SD 52.10a).

¹⁷ On the predators (*gaha*) and the monsters (*rakkhasa*), see SD 52.11 (1.2.2.4).

¹⁸ On “wrong act,” *micchā,dhamma* (DA 3:853), see SD 31.7 (7.1).

¹⁹ On *susukā*, see **Cātumā S** (M 67,17), SD 34.7; **Ūmi,bhaya S** (A 4.122,37), SD 47.9.

²⁰ See **Cātumā S** (M 67,17), SD 34.7. Cf “rampant greed” (*visama,lobha*, DA 3:853): SD 31.7 (7.1).

Only as (*na*) *āvaṭṭa-g, gaho gahessati* in a set of similes

Dāru-k, khandha S S 35.241,3 etc

Of some interest is **gaha**, which, in *sa, gaha* means “with its predators” (It 69,3), but in *āvaṭṭa-g, gaho gahessati* (with a periphrastic verb-construction)²¹ means “seized by a whirlpool” (S 35.241,3+4+11).

2.2.2 Occurrences of the parable elements

Here is a collation of the occurrences of the various elements of the *sa, ūmi* stock or water-crossing parable. In the case of a set of teachings (such as the 6 sense-bases), only the first occurrence of the element is listed.

		<i>ūmi</i>	<i>vīci</i>	<i>āvaṭṭa</i>	<i>gaha rakkhasa</i>	<i>susukā</i>	<i>kumbhīla</i>		
Cātumā Sutta	M 67	§16	-	§18	-	-	§19	§17	SD 34.7
Dāru-k, khandha Sutta 1	S 35.241	-	-	§4	[§10] ²²	-	-	-	SD 28.5
Samudda Sutta 1	S 35.187	§4	-	§4	§4	§4	-	-	SD 52.9
Ūmi Bhaya Sutta	A 4.122	§3	§12	§27	-	-	§39	-	SD 47.9
Rāga Sutta 2	It 69	§3	§3	§3	§3	§3			SD 52.10b
Nadī, sota Sutta	It 109	§6		§6	§6	§6			SD 52.11

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Rāga Sutta 2

The Second Discourse on Lust

It 69

1 This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One, spoken by the arhat [worthy one], thus have I heard.²³

The raging ocean

2 Bhikkhus, whichever monk or nun²⁴ who has not abandoned lust, has not abandoned hate, has not abandoned delusion,

3 that one, bhikkhus, is said to be one who has not crossed the ocean with its waves, its tides, its whirlpools, its predators, its monsters.²⁵

²¹ On periphrasis, see A K Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, 2nd ed 1974:223 Auxiliary verbs.

²² “Seized by non-humans” (*amanussa-g, gaha*) which refers to living the religious life for the sake of heavenly rebirth: **Dāru-k, khandha S** (S 35.200,10/4:180), SD 28.5.

²³ *Vuttam h’etaṃ bhagavatā. Vuttam arahatā’ ti me sutam*. This is said to be spoken by the laywoman **Khujj’uttarā**: see SD 16.14 (1).

²⁴ *Yassa kassaci ... bhikkhussa vā bhikkhuniyā vā*. Clearly, this Sutta is addressed to monastics: cf **Rāga S 1** (SD 52.10a,2) which is addressed to both monastic and laity (ItA 2:36,7).

²⁵ *Ayam vuccati bhikkhave na atari* [only Be *atiṇṇo*] *samuddam sa, ūmiram sa, vīciram s’āvaṭṭam sa’gaham sa’rakkham*. Cf **Samudda S 1** (S 35.187,22ab) + SD 52.9 (1.2).

One who has crossed the ocean

- 4 Bhikshus, whichever monk or nun, has abandoned lust,
has abandoned hate,
has abandoned delusion,

5 that one, bhikshus, is said to be one
 who has crossed the ocean with its waves, its tides,²⁶ its whirlpools, its predators, its monsters,
 he has crossed over, reached the far shore—he stands on dry land, a brahmin.²⁷

The ocean-crossing verses

6 This is the meaning of what the Blessed One said. The meaning here is spoken thus:²⁸

- 7 *Yassa rāgo ca doso ca avijjā ca virājitā* Whose lust, hate and ignorance have been overcome,
so'maṃ samuddaṃ sa,gahaṃ sa,rakkhasaṃ that one has crossed the ocean, hard to cross,
sa,ūmi,bhayaṃ²⁹ duttaram accatāri³⁰ [58] with its predators, its monsters, its danger of waves.
- 8 *Saṅgātigo maccu,jaho nirūpadhi* He's one gone past bondage, renounced death, acquisition-
pahāsi dukkhaṃ apunabbhavāya free, abandoned suffering to be rebirth-free.
atthaṃ,gato so na pamāṇam eti³¹ He's won his goal, comes not to be measured—
amohayi³² maccu,rājan'ti brūmīti he has befooled the King who is Death, I say!

8 This matter [meaning] too was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.³³

— evaṃ —

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²⁶ "(With) its tides," *sa,vīci*: see (1.3.1.3).

²⁷ *Tiṇṇo pāraṇ,gato* [only Be *paraṅgato*] *thale tiṭṭhati brāhmaṇo*. As at **Samudda S 1** (S 35.187,5 etc, refrain), SD 52.9: cf tr.

²⁸ *Etam atthaṃ bhagavā avoca, tatth'etaṃ iti vuccati*.

²⁹ Only Ee *ūmi,bhayaṃ*.

³⁰ Be Ee Se *duttaraṃ accatāri*; Ce *duttaram accatārī* (mc).

³¹ Be Ce *pamāṇameti*; Ee *samānaṃ eti*; Se *samānmeti*.

³² Only Ce *amohayī*.

³³ *Ayam pi attho vutto bhagavatā. Iti me sutan ti*. The foll verse is quoted at Kvu 477 (Kvu:SR 273); cf V 2:205.